R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 014 388 RE 000 295

PINPOINTING SPECIFIC SKILL NEEDS.

BY- WYATT, NITA

PUB DATE MAY 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.52 11P.

DESCRIPTORS- *READING SKILLS, *PHONICS, *READING DIAGNOSIS, *CONTEXT CLUES, OBSERVATION, READING IMPROVEMENT, RETARDED READERS, READING COMPREHENSION,

BEFORE ANY DIAGNOSTIC READING INSTRUCTION IS DONE, TEACHERS SHOULD DETERMINE THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL OF THE CHILD AND SHOULD PINPOINT HIS SPECIFIC SKILL NEEDS BY CAREFULLY OBSERVING HIS ORAL READING BEHAVIOR. THE FOLLOWING SKILLS ARE SUGGESTED AS GOOD INDICATORS OF THE CHILD'S ATTEMPT TO APPLY PHONICS KNOWLEDGE--(1) THE USE OF CONTEXT TO PREDICT WHAT AN UNKNOWN WORD MAY BE BEFORE THE ANALYSIS PROCESS BEGINS OR AS THE PROCESS BEGINS, (2) THE VISUAL DISSECTION OF THE WORD INTO PRONOUNCEABLE UNITS, (3) THE COMPARISON OF SOUNDS PRODUCED THROUGH PHONETIC ANALYSIS WITH FAMILIAR PRONUNCIATIONS, AND (4) THE VARIATION OF THE SOUND VALUE GIVEN TO A WORD UNTIL A RECOGNIZABLE WORD IS PRODUCED. FINDINGS FROM FOUR STUDIES ARE CITED TO SUPPORT THE CONTENTIONS THAT CONNECTED READING REQUIRES AN INTEGRATION OF SEVERAL READING SKILLS WHICH MAY NOT BE REQUIRED IN READING WORD LISTS AND THAT THE TEACHING OF PHONICS IMPROVES WORD READING BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE READING OF CONNECTED MATERIAL. THE TEACHING OF PHONICS, THEREFORE, SHOULD STRESS THE APPLICATION OF PHONICS KNOWLEDGE IN UNLOCKING UNKNOWN WORDS MET IN READING CONNECTED MATERIAL. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (NS)

ED014388

RE 000 295

PINPOINTING SPECIFIC SKILL NEEDS

One of the later speakers in this series has as a topic "The Diagnostic Teaching of Reading". It seems quite appropriate that this topic, "Pinpointing Specific Skill Needs" should precede such a presentation, for in the classroom the pinpointing of specific needs certainly must precede diagnostic teaching. It makes little sense to teach a child what he already knows, but avoiding such repetition requires a "diagnostic" frame-of-mind on the part of the teacher. She must be able to say what the child already knows and does, and plan the instructional program for the child around that knowledge.

It also seems significant to me that this talk follows one entitled "Determining Instructional Level". The determining of instructional level is a starting point for diagnostic teaching, but much more information is needed about a child after instructional level is determined. A study done in 1953 by Mary Watkins[1] at Minnesota pointed up this need very emphatically. Her study compared the reading behavior of third grade children making normal progress in reading with that of children in grades four, five and six reading at the third grade level. She selected 64 pairs of students, each of which was composed of a retarded reader and a normal-progress reader. The children were matched on mean reading grade, IQ, and sex. The Gates Diagnostic Reading Tests, Monroe's Diagnostic Reading Examination, and the Bond Silent Reading Diagnostic Tests were administered. She found that the same total reading score is no indication that the readers possess similar reading patterns. It

---

[1] Watkins, Mary. "A Comparison of the Reading Proficiencies of Normal Progress and Reading Disability Cases of the Same IQ and Reading Level." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1953.

RE 000 295

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

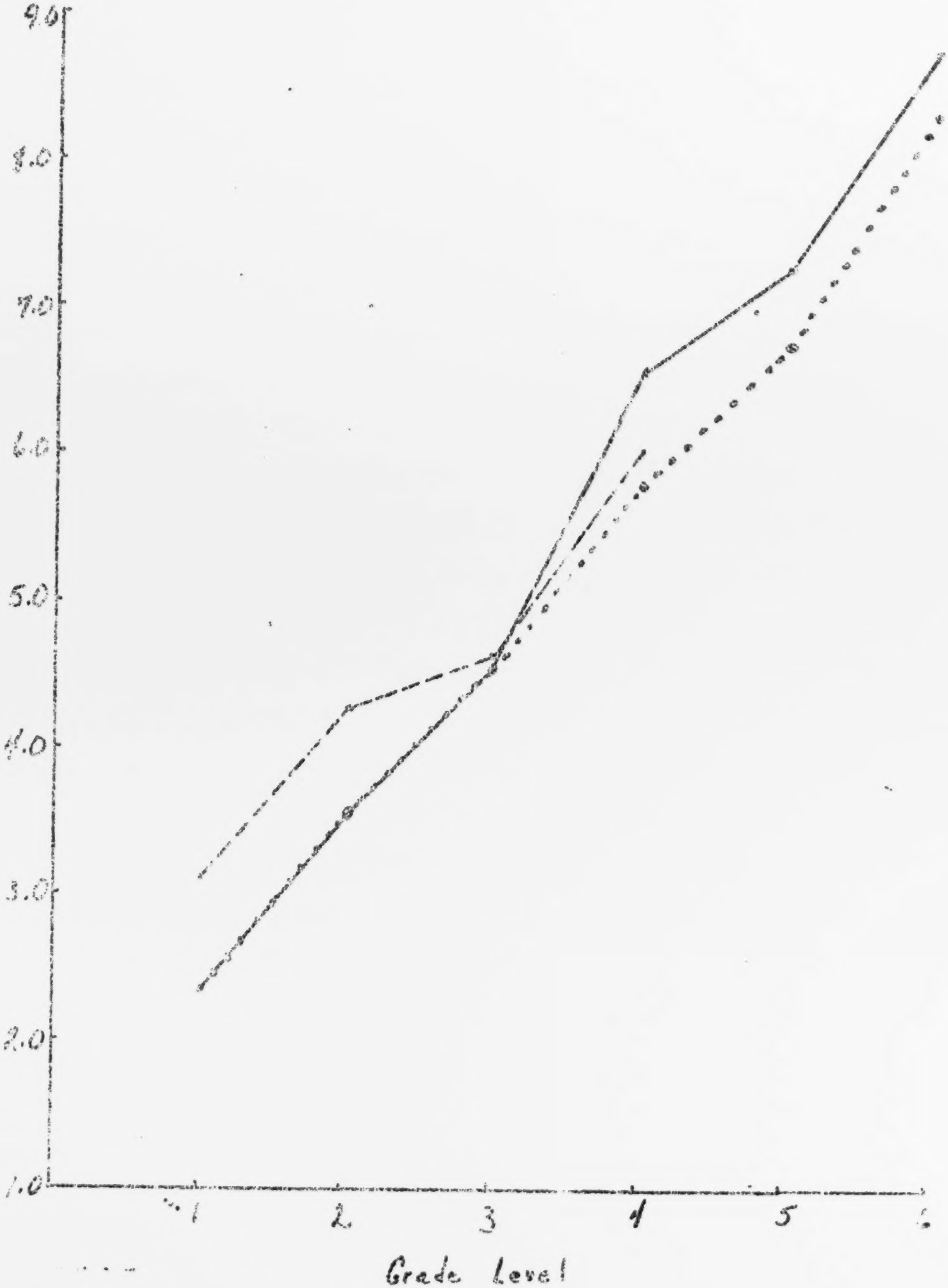
is conceivable that when instructional level is determined through an informal inventory technique, two readers operating at third grade level may have quite different skill needs.

Pinpointing the skill needs of a child reading at the third grade level would involve a study of the total reading process. Discussing all the skills which would need to be assessed seems to be beyond the time limit set for this discussion. I would, therefore, like to assume some familiarity on the part of the audience with some diagnostic procedures and turn the attention of the group to an area which has been of particular interest to me recently. This is the area of phonics teaching and specifically the equating by some teachers of teaching phonics with teaching reading.

Watkins found in her study that there is a distinct difference between normal progress readers and retarded readers. When she pinpointed the skills which differentiated one group from the other, she found that retarded readers were slower readers than normal-progress readers. She also found that "retarded readers seem to possess more phonetic knowledge than the normal-progress group, but the retarded readers do not apply this knowledge." This finding would lead one to hypothesize that teaching "phonics" may not be all there is to the teaching of reading skills.

There is some evidence that we can accelerate word study skills or "phonics" knowledge as measured by the reading of word lists. We can do this by developing an instructional program which devotes time and attention to sound-symbol correspondences and the teaching of various rules or generalizations. The following graph depicts the results of an intensive use of an extraneous phonics program along with a basal reader in a suburban school district. It is interesting to note that there was not automatic

— — Paragraph Meaning
---- Word Study
..... Word Meaning



accompaniment of increased skill in reading meaningful connected material with the increase in word study skills. At second grade level the ability of the children to sound out words seemed far in advance of their abilities to apply this knowledge in connected reading.

The same tendency was noted in the results of one of the First Grade Reading Studies. One experimental approach, called the "linguistic phonic" approach, emphasized sounding from the beginning. The children were expected to use their knowledge of sound-letter relationships immediately in connected reading-the sounding program was not an extraneous one. The following table indicates the results at the first and second grade levels:

Scores on the Stanford Achievement Test for
Three Groups of First Graders Taught With
Three Approaches to Reading Instruction

Group	Word Reading	Word Meaning	Paragraph Meaning	Word Study
FIRST GRADE				
Sex-grouping*	24.4		25.5	40.8
Linguistic-phonic	27.4**		25.8	42.7**
Control*	23.0		23.9	40.4
SECOND GRADE				
Sex-grouping*		19.3	33.7	38.8
Linguistic-phonic		22.1**	35.3	42.1**
Control*		18.4	31.0	37.2

* Groups using basal readers
**Score significantly greater than scores of other groups (.05 level)

At each of the grade levels, it can be noted that the linguistic phonic approach produced significantly greater mean scores in word reading and word study than the other two approaches, which used commonly known basal readers. It was possible to produce significantly better performance in "word reading" through emphasizing phonics, but there was no significant gain in reading connected material through producing greater skill in sounding. Perhaps, as Eisenberg says in commenting about several instances in which brain-damaged children were observed to be fluent in oral reading but quite deficient in comprehension,". . . . they indicate the complex nature of the reading process, in which word recognition and sentence comprehension are separable skills."

Observation of the reading skills of children involved in the first grade study discussed above led to the hypothesis that the bright children in the linguistic-phonic approach behaved differently from the slow children. One would expect the bright children to read better, of course, but there seemed to be a qualitative difference in their behavior. This observation prompted a study of the scores on a standardized test of two groups called "good readers" and "poor readers." Good readers were arbitrarily defined as those who scored at or above grade level 3.1 on the Paragraph Meaning subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test. Poor readers were defined as those who scored at or below grade level 1.7 on the same test. The mean scores of both groups on the Word Reading, and Paragraph Meaning, subtests were then determined and are reported in the following table:

---

[2]Eisenberg, Leon. "The Epidemiology of Reading Retardation and a Program for Preventive Intervention." The Disabled Reader, ed. by John Money. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1966, p. 14.

Group	Number of Students	Word Reading	Paragraph Meaning
Good Readers	25	3.1	3.4
Poor Readers	35	2.7	2.5

It is interesting to note the reversal of position of the two groups on the Word Reading and Paragraph Meaning subtests. The poor readers seemed better able to read word lists than to read connected material, but this did not seem to be true of the good readers. Further evidence of this trend was provided through the observation that 19 of the 25 good readers had higher scores on paragraph meaning than on word meaning. Among the poor readers, 28 of the 35 had higher scores on word reading than on paragraph meaning.

These observations and those cited earlier lead to the hypothesis that we need to give more attention to what a child <u>does</u> as he is reading connected material rather than to what he <u>knows</u> about reading. These "application skills" need to be pinpointed if we are to help children become better readers. The assessment of such skills must be done largely through individual contacts with children as they read, or talk about how they read. The emphasis of the remainder of this will therefore not be upon what tests can be administered, but upon what kinds of behavior a teacher may look for in observing the child in the reading process.

Although the "application" or "integration" skills are not well defined, there are some behaviors that I believe I have more often observed among good readers than among poor readers. It seems to me that the good readers more often:

1. Uses context to predict what an unknown word may be before the analysis process begins or as the process begins.

2. Visually dissects a word into pronounceable units.

3. Measures the sounds he is producing through phonetic analysis of a word against his store of familiar pronunciations.

4. Varies the sound value given to a particular letter or cluster of letters until a recognizable word is produced.

Although most children possess some knowledge associated with these skills soon after they enter school, what they know, in some cases, really cannot be used in the process of reading because of the way it was presented originally. Let us consider each of the skills listed above and note some possible ways of assessing the child's performance of each. We must also be concerned throughout the discussion with child's ability to combine the skills into a usable technique.

1. The good reader uses context to predict what an unknown word may be before the analysis process begins or as the process begins.

The use of context may well be the major skill which distinguishes connected meaningful reading from reading of word lists. It implies that a reader mentally interprets groups of words rather than one word at a time. In silent reading, the reader stores up his visual impressions until he has a meaningful group of words to interpret. In oral reading the eyes are traveling far enough ahead of the voice to give the mind time to group the words and to decide upon the appropriate pitch, stress, and pause patterns to give to the words when they are said. This grouping procedure provides a valuable clue in word analysis, for it tells the reader what type of word to expect in a particular place in a sentence.

Word order and structural clues can tell a child whether an unknown word is a noun or a verb, an adjective or an adverb and this gives him some idea of what the word is. Whether a child groups words in reading can be detected in oral reading through the intonation he produces. Word-by-word reading is often indicated by the use of the same pitch and stress for every word.

Assuming that a child does group words into a meaningful context, we may still find that he does not use this tool as fully as he might in word analysis. Quite often the teacher advises the child to adopt a procedure which puts checking the context after the analysis of the word in question or minimizes the use of content. "Sound it out" is often the first response of a teacher to a child's failure to recognize a word. "What would make sense" would be a better response. The child's analysis of a word may be a more cursory one, a more speedy one, if he has the word in mind before he begins to try to pronounce it from an analysis of the letters representing it. With this skill the assessment may need to involve the teacher's behavior as well as the characteristic behavior of the child. The habit of blindly grouping at sounds may be constantly reinforced by the teacher. Some indication of the presence of the skill of using context as a springboard into word analysis may be inferred from observing a child pronounce just one syllable of a word and then produce the whole word without further study of the spelling of the word. Adults may approximate for themselves the difficulties of word analysis without the use of context by revealing the letters of an isolated word one by one and trying to pronounce them. This may be contrasted with revealing the letters of a word after the surrounding context has been studied.

2. The good reader visually dissects a word into pronounceable unit.

A child may know what a syllable is, know the rules of syllabication, and be able to say a word and tell how many syllables it has without being able to use syllabication in reading. In the reading process a child must look at a string of letters printed on the page and produce some sounds from the looking. If the string of letters is a long one, he may need to look at only a few of them, pronounce the sounds, look at more letters, pronounce more sounds and so on. The real problem for the child then is, "How many of these letters should I consider in the first attempt at pronouncing?" How far should I "look into" this word? Exercises in which the child looks at a word in a list, pronounces it from past contact with it, listens to the sounds and then marks off the syllables in the printed word have little relevance to the task of "looking into" a word which is unknown. Again the instructional program as well as the child's characteristic behavior needs to be assessed. The lack of the skill of dissecting a word visually <u>while</u> reading may be inferred from the child's performance. Such behaviors as refusing to attempt a pronounciation of a new word, consistently producing a sound for the first consonant only, or erratic visual searching for any known element in the word reveal a lack of skill. Skill with visual analysis may be inferred from attempts to pronounce hunks of words as they occur from left to right. Skill in <u>word analysis</u> may be inferred from the combination of this visual analysis with checking of content.

3. The good reader measures the sounds he is producing through phonetic analysis of a word against his store of familiar pronunciations.

Since there are so many ways of representing a particular sound in English spelling, a child's first attempt at pronouncing may produce

only a distant approximation of the word which is recorded. The good reader seems to have the habit of listening to such an approximation and trying to match it with some word stored in his vocabulary bank. For example, a first grade child attempting the word secret said sĕc' ret, then changed immediately to the appropriate pronunciation. She produced kĭnd jer gar for kindergarten and, again, after pronouncing only a part of the word, moved to an accurate pronunciation. Another child, who had difficulty using her word analysis skills in connected reading, said fac tŏ ry for factory. She proceeded with the rest of the sentence without adjusting the word. When she was asked whether she knew a word that made sense which sounded like the one she had produced, she immediately said, "Oh, that's factory, isn't it?"

Although the first grade child discussed above was able to produce kindergarten and secret from approximations of the words, she was not able to produce accurate pronunciations of career and financial. These words were far above her experience level and were not yet words that belonged to her oral vocabulary. Her extensive vocabulary helped her with the analysis of many words, but not every word which she encountered. The child who has a very meager oral vocabulary finds word analysis a difficult task. He often has no word against which to match his attempts at sounding. The instructional program for such a child might well concentrate upon vocabulary building through an enriched oral language program.

4. The good reader varies the sound value given to a particular letter or cluster of letters until a recognizable word is produced.

If you came to the unknown word seed in something you were reading,

how would you pronounce it? Context would not help much because this is a meaningless word. Your first attempt at pronunciation would probably lead to rhyming it with bead, but it might also rhyme with bread or have the vowel sound heard in break. The good reader tries several pronunciations, trying to make the word fit into a pattern he knows. The poor reader often stops with one pronunciation, if he gets that far. Maturity in this skill is being observed when a child attempts several pronunciations of a word and then goes to a dictionary or glossary if none of his attempts produces a word he recognizes. Of course, he must also be able to use diacritical markings to produce an accurate pronunciation when he does go to a dictionary.

In discussing the topic "Pinpointing Specific Skill Needs" I have deliberately ignored many of the specific skills which the teacher needs to consider in teaching reading. I have hypothesized some skills which are not readily measurable but which seem to me to be important as I observe reading disability cases. An accompanying hypothesis that they are also teachable is implied. Having thus pinpointed the limitations of this paper, may I summarize the major points made and suggest them for further study both in the classroom and in controlled research:

1. Connected reading requires an integration of several skills which may not be required in reading word lists.

2. The good reader more often relies on use of context and a broad oral vocabulary than does the poor reader.

3. A poor reader may be a poor reader because he has a meager oral vocabulary.

4. The good reader produces several approximations of a word and constantly matches his approximations with words he knows which would make sense in the context he is dealing with.

5. It seems possible to teach phonics knowledge without teaching the application of such knowledge in connected reading.